



# Rock & Roll Jihad: A Muslim Rock Star's Revolution

*Salman Ahmad*

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"The story you are about to read is the story of a light-bringer....Salman Ahmad inspires me to reach always for the greatest heights and never to fear....Know that his story is a part of our history."

-- Melissa Etheridge, from the Introduction

With 30 million record sales under his belt, and with fans including Bono and Al Gore, Pakistanborn Salman Ahmad is renowned for being the first rock & roll star to destroy the wall that divides the West and the Muslim world. *Rock & Roll Jihad* is the story of his incredible journey.

Facing down angry mullahs and oppressive dictators who wanted all music to be banned from the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Salman Ahmad rocketed to the top of the music charts, bringing Westernstyle rock and pop to Pakistani teenagers for the first time. His band Junoon became the U2 of Asia, a sufi - rock group that broke boundaries and sold a record number of albums. But Salman's story began in New York, where he spent his teen years learning to play guitar, listening to Led Zeppelin, hanging out at rock clubs and Beatles Fests, making American friends, and dreaming of rock-star fame. That dream seemed destined to die when his family returned to Pakistan and Salman was forced to follow the strictures of a newly religious -- and stratified -- society. He finished medical school, met his soul mate, and watched his beloved funkytown of Lahore transform with the rest of Pakistan under the rule of Zia into a fundamentalist dictatorship: morality police arrested couples holding hands in public, *Little House on the Prairie* and Live Aid were banned from television broadcasts, and Kalashnikovs and rocket launchers proliferated on college campuses via the Afghani resistance to Soviet occupation in the north.

Undeterred, the teenage Salman created his own underground jihad: his mission was to bring his beloved rock music to an enthusiastic new audience in South Asia and beyond. He started a traveling guitar club that met in private Lahore spaces, mixing Urdu love poems with Casio synthesizers, tablas with Fender Stratocasters, and ragas with power chords, eventually joining his first pop band, Vital Signs. Later, he founded Junoon, South Asia's biggest rock band, which was followed to every corner of the world by a loyal legion of fans called Junoonis. As his music climbed the charts, Salman found himself the target of religious fanatics and power-mad politicians desperate to take him and his band down. But in the center of a new generation of young Pakistanis who go to mosques as well as McDonald's, whose religion gives them compassion for and not fear of the West, and who see modern music as a "rainbow bridge" that links their lives to the rest of the world, nothing could stop Salman's star from rising.

Today, Salman continues to play music and is also a UNAIDS Goodwill Ambassador, traveling the world as a spokesperson and using the lessons he learned as a musical pioneer to help heal the wounds between East and West -- lessons he shares in this illuminating memoir.

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